JAPANESE FAIRY TALE SERIES No. 25

# CHIN CHIN KOBAKAMA

RENDERED INTO ENGLISH BY

LAFCADIO HEARN

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THE floor of a Japanese room is covered with beautiful thick soft mats of woven reeds. They fit very closely together, so that you can just slip a knife-blade between them. They are changed once every year, and are kept very clean. The Japanese never wear shoes in the house, and do not use chairs or furniture such as English people use. They sit, sleep, eat, and sometimes even write upon the floor. So the mats must be kept very clean indeed, and Japanese children are taught, just as soon as they can speak, never to spoil or dirty the mats.

Now Japanese children are really very good. All travellers, who have written pleasant books about Japan, declare that Japanese children are much more obedient than English

children and much less mischievous. They do not spoil and dirty things, and they do not even break their own toys. A little Japanese girl does not break her doll. No, she takes great care of it, and keeps it even after she becomes a woman and is married. When she becomes a mother, and has a daughter, she gives the doll to that little daughter. And the child takes the same care of the doll that her mother did, and preserves it until she grows up; and gives it at last to her own children, who play with it just as nicely as their grandmother did. So I, — who am writing this little story for you, — have seen in Japan, dolls more than a hundred years old, looking just as pretty as when they were new. This will show you how very good Japanese children are; and you will be able to understand why the floor of a Japanese room is nearly always kept clean, — not scratched and spoiled by mischievous play.

You ask me whether all, *all* Japanese children are as good

as that? Well—no, there are a few, a very few naughty ones. And what happens to the mats in the houses of these naughty children? Nothing very bad—because there are fairies who take care of the mats. These fairies tease and frighten children who dirty or spoil the mats. At least—they used to tease and frighten such mischievous children. I am not quite sure whether those little fairies still live in Japan,—because the new railways and the telegraph-poles have frightened a great many fairies away. But here is a little story about them:—

ONCE there was a little girl who was very pretty, but also very lazy. Her parents were rich, and had a great many servants; and these servants were very

fond of the little girl, and did everything for her which she ought to have been able to do for herself. Perhaps this was what made her so lazy. When she grew up into a beautiful woman, she still remained lazy; but as the servants always dressed and undressed her,

and arranged her hair, she looked very charming, and nobody thought about her faults.

At last she was married to a brave warrior, and went away with him to live in another house where there were but few servants. She was sorry not to have as many servants as she had had at home, because she was obliged to do several things for herself, which other folks had always done for her. It was such trouble to her to dress herself, and take care of her own clothes, and keep herself looking neat and pretty to please her husband.

But as he was a warrior, and often had to be far away from home with the army, she could sometimes be just as lazy as she wished. Her husband's parents were very old and good-natured, and never scolded her.

Well, one night while her husband was away with the army, she was awakened by queer little noises in her room. By the light of a big paper-lantern she could see very well; and she saw strange things. What?

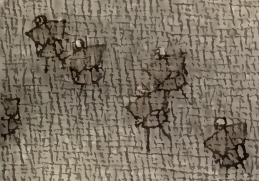
Hundreds of little men, dressed just like Japanese warriors, but only about one inch high, were dancing all around her pillow. They wore the same kind of dress her husband wore on holidays, — (*Kamishimo*, a long robe with square shoulders),—and their hair was tied up in knots, and each wore two tiny swords. They all looked at her as they danced, and laughed, and they all sang the same song, over and over again,—

"*Chin-chin Kobakama,*

*Yomo fuké sōro,*—

*Oshizumare, Hime-gimi!*—

*Ya ton ton!*"—



Which meant:—"We are the Chin-chin Kobakama;—

the hour is late;—Sleep, honorable noble darling!"

The words seemed very polite; but she soon saw that the little men were only making cruel fun of her. They also made ugly faces at her.

She tried to catch some of them; but they jumped about so quickly that she could not. Then she tried to drive them away; but they would not go, and they never stopped singing

"*Chin-chin Kobakama*, . . . . . "

and laughing at her. Then she knew they were little fairies, and became so frightened that she could not even cry out. They danced around her until morning;—then they all vanished suddenly.

She was ashamed to tell anybody what had happened—because, as she was the wife of a warrior, she did not wish anybody to know how frightened she had been.

Next night, again the little men came and danced, and they came also the night after that, and every night — always at the same hour, which the old Japanese used to call the "Hour of the Ox;" that is, about two o'clock in the morning by our time. At last she became very sick, through want of sleep and through fright. But the little men would not leave her alone.

When her husband came back home, he was very sorry to find her sick in bed. At first she was afraid to tell him what had made her ill, for fear that he would laugh at her. But he was so kind, and coaxed her so gently,

that after a while she told him what happened every night.

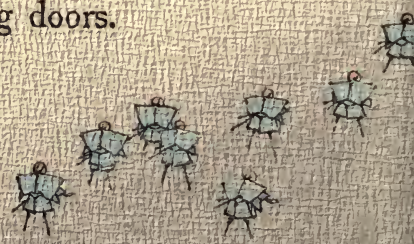
He did not laugh at her at all, but looked very serious for a time. Then he asked:—

"At what time do they come?"

She answered:—"Always at the same hour—the 'Hour of the Ox."

"Very well," said her husband,—"to-night I shall hide and watch for them. Do not be frightened."

So that night the warrior hid himself in a closet in the sleeping room, and kept watch through a chink between the sliding doors.



He waited and watched until the "Hour of the Ox." Then, all at once, the little men came up through the mats, and began their dance and their song:—

"*Chin-chin*
*Kobakama,*
*Yomo fuké*
*Sōro.....*"

They looked so queer, and danced in such a funny way, that the warrior could scarcely keep from laughing. But he saw his young wife's frightened face; and then remembering that nearly all Japanese ghosts and goblins are afraid of a sword, he drew his blade,

and rushed out of the closet, and struck at the little dancers. Immediately they all turned into—what do you think?

*Toothpicks!*

There were no more little warriors—only a lot of old toothpicks scattered over the mats.

The young wife had been too lazy to put her toothpicks away properly; and every day, after having used a new toothpick, she would stick it down between the mats on the floor, to get rid of it. So the little fairies who take care of the floor-mats became angry with her, and tormented her

Her husband scolded her, and she was so ashamed that she did not know what to do. A servant was called, and the toothpicks were taken away and burned. After that the little men never came back again.

THERE is also a story told about a lazy little girl, who used to eat plums, and afterward hide the plum-stones between the floor-mats. For a long time she was able to do this without being found out. But at last the fairies got angry and punished her.

For every night, tiny, tiny women—all wearing bright red robes with very long sleeves,—rose up from the floor at the same hour, and danced, and made faces at her and prevented her from sleeping.

Her mother one night sat up to watch, and saw them, and struck at them, — and they all turned into plumstones! So the naughtiness of that little girl was found out. After that she became a very good girl indeed.

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